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Spiritual Direction for Spouses

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CATHOLIC FAMILY MINISTRY

*The Scientific Reflection
and the Practical Ministry of the Church*

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nourished by the sacraments, and striving to raise the children in the faith. Childless couples, whose ministry would in a way realize their fertility, may be good candidates for this service. It is best if the priest chooses spouses who will be accepted by the parish community. A couple's relational qualities, such as the ability to listen and communicate, openness and acceptance, intimacy and friendship, and leadership skills is a good sign. There are few parish communities with such couples. However, there are many families with a vigorous desire to grow in faith and love who have already received a formation in movements and ecclesial communities. They could be invited by the priest to be trained for accompaniment. Experience teaches us that, over time, people who have been accompanied often become accompanists.

8. Spiritual Direction for Spouses

JACEK GOLEŃ

The universal call to holiness is pursued as the faithful progress toward the full stature of Christ and edify his Mystical Body, the Church, bearing witness to Christian hope and shaping the world. The baptized should all be led into the mystery of salvation, so that they may become increasingly aware of the gift of faith and of their vocation, learning to worship God and lead the life as the new man (cf. GE 2). Maturity can be reached in certain conditions, including getting to know oneself, recognizing one's vocation, and discerning and doing God's will. In this field, the Church has been effectively serving the faithful since the first centuries through spiritual direction.²⁸⁴

Spiritual direction helps believers in every state of life to advance on the path of sanctification.²⁸⁵ This ministry of the Church, under the guidance of a designated person, is a part of the service of God's Word.²⁸⁶ It focuses prin-

²⁸⁴ Cf. PDV 40; PMD 64.

²⁸⁵ PMD 66, 77. We describe the ministry of spiritual direction with the expressions: "spiritual counsel," "spiritual guidance," and "spiritual accompaniment." Cf. PMD 64. The text also speaks of spiritual direction, spiritual accompaniment, spiritual fatherhood or motherhood, spiritual therapy, or spiritual animation. Spiritual direction is an ecclesial ministry which aims to develop the relationship between God and the directed person as well as deepening the person's prayer life. Although there are some common points, spiritual direction of the spouses cannot be identified with the pastoral accompaniment, conjugal and family accompaniment, marital therapy or the pastoral dialog. Cf. T. Paszkowska, *Psychologia w kierownictwie duchowym*, Lublin, 2007, 27-58.

²⁸⁶ M. Szentmártoni, *Psychologia pastoralna*, 59.

cipally on the dialogue of the directed person with God, on the relationship with Him, and on prayer;²⁸⁷ and its emphasis is on “discernment of the Spirit leading to sanctification, the apostolic mission and communion in ecclesial life” (PMD 70). In connection with the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, it should be conducted during or after the period of penance.²⁸⁸ This ministry is most commonly exercised by priests and consecrated persons, but lay people may also be formed to render this ecclesial service (cf. PMD 79). The spiritual direction of lay people aims at promoting brotherly love through sanctification in the family, at work, or in the community. It stimulates and sustains them in responsible action while striving to sanctify the human realities from within. A personal inner life is necessary, as well as involvement in the life and events of the family, at work, and in the social and political spheres. (cf. PMD 107, 122-124).

Receiving spiritual direction is a voluntary act of the faithful who seek salvation. It helps especially those who want to develop their spiritual life.²⁸⁹ People receiving advice should nurture the desire for holiness and, seeking God’s will, confidentially present their situation, and take the initiative in developing the charisms they have received (cf. PMD 79). When asking for spiritual direction, the person should be guided by the right intention and disposition, i.e., with the trust based on the faith in the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, honesty, openness of the heart in the relation with the spiritual guide and the ability to subordinate his will to him, with the willingness to cooperate.²⁹⁰

The covenant with Christ, which is an integral part of the sacrament of marriage, calls for fidelity and growth in mutual love.²⁹¹ In this sacrament, the spouses’ personal relationship with God is linked to their mutual relationship. Yet, although the spouses’ bond reflects God’s fidelity, it should not dominate each one’s personal relationship with Him. God alone can occupy the center of each spouse’s life. There must be an exclusive space that each reserves for his/her personal relationship with Him. This relation, in fact, makes it possible to heal the wounds received in their common life and to find in God’s love

²⁸⁷ W.A. Barry – W.J. Connolly, *Kierownictwo duchowe w praktyce*, Krakow, 1992, 27.

²⁸⁸ Cf. DPŻK 18; PMD 73. W. Jankowski, “Kierownictwo duchowe w duszpasterstwie rodzin,” in: E. Bogurad – B. Bassa – K. Wolski (eds.), *Postęga spowiedników w realizacji powołania małżeńskiego. Materiały z sympozjum na temat dokumentu Papieskiej Rady ds. Rodziny “Vademecum, dla spowiedników.” O niektórych zagadnieniach moralnych dotyczących życia małżeńskiego (18.11.1998)*, Lomianki, 1999, 113.

²⁸⁹ J. Krajczyński, *Prawo rodziny do opieki duszpasterskiej*, Plock, 2007, 271.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 272-3.

²⁹¹ Cf. CCC 1603-1617 and AL 319.

the meaning of their existence (AL 320). In this sense, the spiritual direction of a spouse, which constitutes a bond with God, also takes into account the relationship with the other spouse.²⁹²

Pope Francis recalls that pastors should encourage families to grow in faith through frequent confession and spiritual direction (AL 227). On the other hand, it is well known that Christian spouses often expect priests to exercise spiritual directorship and form consciences. They are looking for confessors and spiritual directors who are experts on the path of evangelical perfection (FSMF 8). Moreover, the spouses, by virtue of the sacrament of marriage, help and support one another on their spiritual path (CCC 1641).

Spiritual Direction: An Aid for Spouses Striving Towards Holiness

The universal call to holiness is also addressed to spouses and Christian parents (FC 34). It implies both the gift of grace and the obligation to develop a conjugal and family spirituality (cf. FC 56). The spiritual life of the spouses draws on God's gift of grace received in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and marriage. By the sacrament of marriage, the spouses are consecrated and fortified in the dignity and the duties related to marriage and the family. In this sacrament, Christ penetrates the lives of the spouses, purifies their faith, hope, and love, as they to strive toward perfection and mutual sanctification, and together glorify God (cf. GS 48). *Amoris Laetitia* adds that the Holy Trinity resides in the temple of the conjugal communion and is intimately present in conjugal love that glorifies God. The conjugal spirituality is a spiritual bond inhabited by God's love. God dwells in the multifaceted experiences, gifts, and encounters that build a family's unity (cf. AL 314-315). The document reminds us that deep family communion is the path to holiness in everyday life, through mystical growth and the inner union with God. Increasingly, opening one's heart to others makes a more fulfilling encounter with the Lord possible (cf. 1 Jn 4:12; AL 316). The spouses should express their gratitude to God for the fact that, through their conjugal and family life, they can contemplate and participate in the God's love for humanity and Christ's love for the Church (see AL 325).

The community of God and people formed in the sacrament of marriage unites the spouses in the love of Christ. They, therefore, give themselves not only to one another but also to Christ, who offers himself and makes them

²⁹² L. Słup, "Widziane oczyma żony. O kierownictwie duchowym w małżeństwie," in: J. Augustyn – J. Kołacz (eds.), *Sztuka kierownictwa duchowego. Poradnik dla księży*, Krakow, 2007, 540.

able to be a gift for each other and for him.²⁹³ God gives the spouses His grace and, at the same time, calls them to transform their lives, making them into a continuous spiritual sacrifice in communion with the mystery of Christ's cross (FC 56; cf. AL 317). At the same time, moments of joy, rest, and celebration, as well as the conjugal union, may be experienced as part of his resurrection (AL 317). The conjugal spirituality is, therefore, the union of persons in the light of the paschal faith. The spouses' paschal faith is strengthened firstly by their joint participation in the Eucharist. By accepting Christ, the spouses seal the paschal covenant that unites them. "The food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a domestic church" (AL 318).

Spouses frequently experience their own weakness, and this allows them to see that they need to rely on God. With His help, they discover the mystery of marriage and surround one another with love. Christ's grace frees them from every obstacle as they pursue their vocation in marriage.²⁹⁴ The Holy Spirit impulses them to discover the deepest spiritual dimension of their conjugal relationship²⁹⁵ and to see marriage as a community in the encounter with the God of love and life. The spiritual director should serve the experience of marriage as the place for meeting God and creating the domestic Church.²⁹⁶

Spiritual direction is an important form of pastoral assistance, which begins with the discernment of the vocation to marriage and the reasons for receiving the sacrament of marriage. It also helps people to fulfill their marriage vocation. The discernment of the action of the Holy Spirit makes it possible to choose the path indicated by God. The spiritual director of the spouses must strive to emphasize the power of the sacrament of marriage that has been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit and fully embraces them as spouses.²⁹⁷ Their guide should teach them the use of the sacraments as a source of grace and sanctification. On the path of marriage, the regular reception of the sacraments of the Eucharist, penance, and reconciliation, is particularly important. The spiritual director should show that the Eucharist is the source of marital holiness and love. He should make it clear that by living fully the Eucharistic experience, the spouses can accomplish their baptismal priesthood, offering the sacrifice of their marriage and family life to

²⁹³ Cf. J.A. Kłys, "Małżeństwo drogą do świętości," in: F. Adamski (ed.), *Miłość, małżeństwo, rodzina*, Krakow, 1985, 157.

²⁹⁴ Cf. W. Jankowski, "Kierownictwo duchowe w duszpasterstwie rodzin," 113.

²⁹⁵ L. Słup, "Widziane oczyma żony," 539.

²⁹⁶ Cf. W. Jankowski, art. cit., 114.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

God, experience transformation, and find the complete meaning of their lives. When presenting the sacrament of penance and reconciliation to the spouses, the guide should help him see how it restores the state of grace and baptismal holiness and that it is the source of the divine mercy that rebuilds and perfects the conjugal covenant and the family's communion.²⁹⁸

The spiritual director can teach the couple how to pray personally, together, and with the family.²⁹⁹ Prayer is absolutely necessary for the communion of the married couple and the family. It is a way of strengthening the spouses' paschal faith,³⁰⁰ and sometimes helps people to find the *sacrum* in their lives and constitutes a path of sanctification.³⁰¹ Prayer is also a requirement of the responsibility for the partner's spiritual life and helping its development.³⁰² Of the many forms of prayer, the spiritual director should explain how to meditate on God's word. "The word of God is not only good news in a person's private life but also a criterion of judgment and a light in discerning the various challenges that married couples and families encounter" (AL 227). He should also stress the importance of preparing for the sacraments, of the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, devotion and dedication to the Heart of Jesus, the different ways of venerating the Mother of God, especially reciting the Rosary together in the family, prayer before and after meal and at different moments in daily life.³⁰³ The spiritual director should discern the prayer experience in the light of the word of God and the teaching of the Church.³⁰⁴

Spiritual guidance in marriage contributes to the progression of the spouses' continuous formation while serving their spiritual and moral development. It helps to get to know oneself better, to discern motives, thus protecting the spouses against dangers and mistakes.³⁰⁵ Properly managed spiritual guidance helps spouses grow in the Christian virtues and to sanctify their conjugal life.³⁰⁶

²⁹⁸ FC 57-59; cf. LtF 18; SCa 28-29, 79.

²⁹⁹ Cf. M. Brzeziński, "Życie duchowe rodziny," in: A. Tomkiewicz – W. Wieczorek (eds.), *Rodzina jako Kościół domowy*, Lublin, 2010, 338.

³⁰⁰ FC 59-60; LtF 10; AL 318.

³⁰¹ M. Brzeziński, loc. cit., 338.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 335.

³⁰³ Cf. FC 38, 61; SCa 68; RVM 41-42; AL 318.

³⁰⁴ W. Jankowski, "Kierownictwo duchowe w duszpasterstwie rodzin," 113.

³⁰⁵ J. Krajczyński, *Prawo rodziny do opieki duszpasterskiej*, 271.

³⁰⁶ Pontifical Council for the Family, *Vademecum for confessors concerning some aspects of the morality of conjugal life* (12 Feb. 2012), nos. 3, 6: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_12021997_vademecum_en.html (consulted on 29.06.2017).

Spiritual Direction and Conjugal Love

Husband and wife, having received from God a unique vocation, embody the mystery of Christ and the Church.³⁰⁷ Their love tends to a deeply personal unity which makes not only into one flesh, but leads them to have one heart and one soul (FC 13). The personal spiritual life of each spouse is shaped by their relationship and the desire for the other's spiritual good. As they help one another in this dimension, their union grows, and they can fully share their spiritual goods. This makes their deep love grow and become like Christ's love for the Church.³⁰⁸

Conjugal love is rooted in the natural man-woman complementarity and the personal will of spouses. God receives this human love in the sacrament of marriage, strengthens, purifies, and elevates, offering the couple the gift of a new communion of love (FC 19). However, the bond of a married couple, confirmed by the sacrament of marriage, requires their cooperation in order to be strengthened. This is why *Amoris Laetitia* recalls that marriage cannot be understood as something that happens once for all. The relationship, which is real, has been confirmed and sanctified by the sacrament of marriage, but the spouses are united to become creators of their own history and of the project that they must actively assume together (AL 218). When creating their bond of love, the spouses pass from erotic and emotional fascination to mature love, which integrates all the human dimensions and aspects of their life together (cf. AL 163-164, 220). As the spouses grow towards the maturity in their relationship they also progress in their relationship with God (AL 316).³⁰⁹

The spiritual director has the task of showing the spouses how God's love is present and active in marriage, where it must be continually received.³¹⁰ The accompanist of the husband or the wife should support them in their efforts to overcome selfishness and build the conjugal communion, emphasizing the need for dialogue and joint decision-making (see AL 218, 220, 224). The spiritual direction of the spouses cannot overlook the conjugal interpersonal relationships. He must bear in mind that often people have problems communicating and that marital conflicts are caused by incomprehension between men and women, as well as by character differences, personal habits,

³⁰⁷ W. Jankowski, "Kierownictwo duchowe w duszpasterstwie rodzin," 116.

³⁰⁸ Cf. F. Adamski, "Duchowość życia małżeńsko-rodzinnego," in: *Miłość, małżeństwo, rodzina*, 186.

³⁰⁹ L. Słup, "Widziane oczyma żony," 542.

³¹⁰ Cf. W. Jankowski, "Kierownictwo duchowe w duszpasterstwie rodzin," 112.

insufficient maturity, or human weakness. Consequently, it is necessary to emphasize the need for forgiveness, which is closely linked to the mystery of conjugal unity rooted in God's prevenient love and can restore the couple's dialog.³¹¹

Often conflicts and crises in matrimonial relationships stem from the emotional and sexual immaturity of spouses (cf. AL 41). They may also have their source in the family of origin, if bad relationships with parents and siblings have not been healed (cf. AL 239-240) or if established dysfunctional patterns make intimacy difficult.³¹² In those cases, the spiritual director has to encourage the individuals to be courageous and patiently work on themselves and, so, lead them to experience God's inner healing. They should, moreover, be encouraged to express their grief before Him and to entrust Him with their difficulties, praying for themselves and their spouses, for healing and strengthening in their mutual obligations (cf. AL 227, 240, 318). The experience of impotence and suffering can help them to accept God's healing grace. This makes it possible for them to be reconciled with the history of their lives, and so – having been innerly transformed and liberated – to build conjugal communion.³¹³ On the path of this reconciliation, there is at times a need for professional help;³¹⁴ in these cases, the spiritual director can help to live through the process. When the spouses' relationship is difficult, they will be supported by the prayer of a priest or a community who entrust the couple and their well-being to the Lord and to the Mother of God.

When there is conflict in a marriage, if the husband and the wife are accompanied by the same spiritual director, there is a risk that the accompanist will get involved in the conflict and give stronger support to one of the parties. In order to help in such situations, the director must maintain both

³¹¹ See AL 106-108, 136-141, and 336; L. Stup, art. cit., 542-3.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 544.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ Cf. AL 229 and 236. Sometimes the conflicts of spouses override their ability to communicate and forgive, especially when their underlying mental or moral causes lie. In many cases psychotherapeutic help may be helpful. Pope Francis, in some cases and as a last resort, also sees the need for separation: "In some cases, respect for one's own dignity and the good of the children requires not giving in to excessive demands or preventing a grave injustice, violence or chronic ill-treatment. In such cases, separation becomes inevitable. At times it even becomes morally necessary, precisely when it is a matter of removing the more vulnerable spouse or young children from serious injury due to abuse and violence, from humiliation and exploitation, and from disregard and indifference." Even so, separation must be considered as a last resort, after all other reasonable attempts at reconciliation have proved vain" (AL 241). The Pope encourages in such situations to conjugal love, which goes beyond feelings and work for good in the distance, but "in spite of everything" (AL 119).

a proper attitude and the necessary distance. In any case, it that it would then be better for the spouses to have different spiritual directors.³¹⁵

The task of the spiritual director is to assist the spouses in their effort to live their conjugal and parental love responsibly. He should make it clear that conjugal chastity is a virtue that serves conjugal love.³¹⁶ The essence of conjugal chastity is the awareness that God is present in their love, and that He and His plan of love are respected in mutual self-giving in their sexual union. This act demands fidelity, honor, and generosity towards the spouse and to the life that may be born of their love (LP 20). Conjugal chastity is at the center of the marital spirituality. The gifts of the Holy Spirit penetrate it. Combined with respect, it creates internal order in the conjugal union. It is not only the fruit of the spouses' efforts but also a gift of the Holy Spirit with whom they cooperate (CCC 2345).

Observing conjugal chastity requires discipline and control over the body's impulses (cf. Rom 8:3), which do not always serve love and life. In spiritual direction, this discipline should be shown in a positive light, not as a necessity for one's repudiation but as a condition for surrendering to the Holy Spirit, which makes it possible to avoid satisfying the impulses of the flesh (cf. Gal 5:16).³¹⁷ Self-discipline has significant advantages because it brings harmony and peace to family life, encourages caring for the partner, and inspires respect, while also helping to overcome selfishness, teaching responsibility and enabling parents to have more effective influence in the education of their children.³¹⁸ Conjugal chastity conditions responsible parenthood.³¹⁹

The spiritual director of spouses, appreciating the import of chastity in the experience of love, should call for the behavior necessary to preserve it, show its value and the spiritual joy that comes from maintaining the integrity of the dual function of the sign of the conjugal union.³²⁰ He should explain that maintaining the ethical order in the spouses' sexual life requires self-discipline, asceticism, and periodic continence (HV 21). The chastity of fiancés con-

³¹⁵ L. Słup, art. cit., 543.

³¹⁶ GS 51; FC 33, 37; CCC 2337, 2350; LP 16-20, 31; cf. A. Dzióba, *Narzeczeni wobec ludzkiej płodności. Studium pastoralne*, 58-60, 126-31.

³¹⁷ Cf. Gal 5:16; W. Jankowski, "Kierownictwo duchowe w duszpasterstwie rodzin," 115-6.

³¹⁸ HV 21; FC 33, TMHS 21, 31. The impact of conjugal chastity on married life is closely analysed, on the basis of detailed surveys of the *engaged couples*, by A. Dzióba, *Narzeczeni wobec ludzkiej płodności. Studium pastoralne*, 137-43.

³¹⁹ W. Jankowski, "Kierownictwo duchowe w duszpasterstwie rodzin," 115.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 113, 117. An attempt to separate these two dimensions reinforces selfishness and makes love die. M. Dziewiecki, "Kierownictwo duchowe narzeczonych i małżonków," in: J. Augustyn - J. Kołacz (eds.), *Sztuka kierownictwa duchowego. Poradnik dla księży*, 556.

tributes to building this attitude. If the spouses are unable to observe chastity, they need the help of a spiritual director, prayer to heal love's wounds caused by sin and ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of the conjugal chastity.

Although the spouses' sexual union may strengthen their love, it often involves difficulties. It engages people in all their dimensions, and hence the problems associated with married life are often a sign of problems experienced on the emotional, communicative, or spiritual level.³²¹ When expressed in spiritual direction, these issues can be considered with the aim of determining what kind of professional help the spouses need. The spiritual director should limit himself to his field of competence and, focusing on the spouses' relationship with God, lead them to experience salvation in Christ. With this aim, he should call any possible sin by name and dispel the spouses' doubts in the light of the teaching of the Church.³²² The accompanist should render present to spouses struggling with difficulties the love of the Redeemer, awaken their faith and encourage them to receive the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance frequently. He should especially support them so that they do not become discouraged because of their own weaknesses (HV 29).

Certain difficulties may arise when one of the spouses has a strong desire for spiritual development, is intensely involved, participates in spiritual retreats and movements, while the partner is not baptized or does not want to practice the faith (AL 228). These spouses should be reminded that they are on a personal path to God, but it should be adapted to their life together.³²³ Pope Francis suggests that some common values can be found, enthusiastically shared, and relished. In such cases, loving one's spouse, seeking his/her happiness, relieving suffering, and sharing is a true path of sanctification (AL 228).

The widowed spouses or those who have been abandoned, and single parents need spiritual direction (cf. PŻMR 51). The help of a spiritual director can be beneficial for spouses whose marriage was proven invalid by the ecclesiastical court, as well as for those who are waiting for an invalidation. It can provide valuable spiritual support and help to discern and accept God's will in the situation they are going through. Discernment can also recommend ascertaining the validity of a marriage (cf. SCa 29). The spiritual direction of the abandoned spouses should help them to deepen their sacramental and prayer life, and strengthen their bond with the community of the Church.

³²¹ See A. Cencini – A. Manenti, *Psychologia a formacja. Struktura i dynamika*, Krakow, 2002, 242–51.

³²² L. Słup, "Widziane oczyma żony," 545.

³²³ Cf. *ibid.*, 543.

The prayer of the spouses and praying with and for them supports as they strive to accomplish their vocation in marriage (cf. LtF 14). Prayer strengthens their love, helps them to acquire the virtue of conjugal chastity as well as other values that are important for conjugal love, including the inner freedom necessary for self-discipline, living faith, responsibility for oneself and for others, fidelity, honesty, respect, and generous openness to life (cf. TMHS 18). A close bond with the Mother of God is the privileged means for strengthening the communion of love in marriage and the family (FC 61).

Spiritual Direction as a Support for Responsible Parenthood

Conjugal love is closely connected with the fecundity is expressed through the birth of children and their education (cf. HV 9). Spouses should be aware that, in the field of procreation and education, they are partners and transmitters of the love of the Creator God.³²⁴ The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* recalls that spouses should be encouraged to procreate, as children are a great gift from God, a joy for parents and for the Church (cf. AL 222). Spouses are called to responsible parenthood, i.e., to follow the principle of the desire to have more offspring, while taking into account the reality of their situation. This means living in accordance with the objective moral order and an upright conscience, controlling the passions by means of reason and the will, knowing and respecting biological functions, and careful discernment as well as generously welcoming offspring (cf. HV 10). At the same time, the fecundity of the conjugal love is not limited to having children but also finds its accomplishment in moral and spiritual life. The spiritual values that parents hand on to their children are transmitted to the Church and to the world (FC 28).

Spiritual direction helps spouses to carry out of the conjugal and parental tasks.³²⁵ The spiritual director, listening to the spouses' experience with God and discerning their parental needs, helps them to hear the divine call to fruitful love in their concrete circumstances. Pope Francis emphasizes the need for the spouses to listen to God's voice speaking in their conscience and to his commandments, while docilely receiving spiritual guidance, so that their decision may be free of subjective judgment and conformism. He underlines that "the pastoral care of newly married couples must also involve encouraging them to be generous in bestowing life" (AL 222). Spiritual ac-

³²⁴ Cf. CCC 2367; GS 50.

³²⁵ M. Dziewiecki, "Kierownictwo duchowe narzeczonych i małżonków," 554.

companiment that leads to greater intimacy with Christ helps in discerning through dialogue and making responsible choices with regard to procreation (cf. *ibid.*). It can also help spouses to overcome any resistance and be ready to welcome another child, through conception or adoption.³²⁶

Spiritual direction is valuable for helping spouses to deploy their spiritual fecundity in education, through the transmission of the faith and moral values. This should also include the child-parent relationship. It should be recalled that children can feel loved only within the mutual love of the spouses and not outside or at the expense of the conjugal love. It is important to help the spouses to become sensible and wise educators, who can be loving and demanding at the same time.³²⁷ In giving spiritual direction to spouses, their educational difficulties should not be left aside but enlightened with the Word of God. Some educational problems have the source in the past life of the spouses. Thus, reconciliation with their own life's history and forgiving one's loved ones, God, and oneself is important not only for the conjugal bond but also for the mature realization of fatherhood and motherhood. Reflection and prayer help the spouses to verify and correct their attitude toward family life.³²⁸ In this field, the support of the spiritual director appears indispensable.

When particular difficulties appear in the relationship with children and there are educational problems, the intercessory prayer of the spiritual director is essential. In crisis situations, if he deems it necessary to call on outside help, he should suggest and encourage the parents to seek professional medical, psychological, pedagogical, and legal assistance.³²⁹ However, in spiritual direction, it must be remembered that relational problems with children constitute the first call to the personal repentance and the mutual forgiveness.³³⁰

The spiritual direction can support spouses who cannot have children (cf. DVt II, 8). The spiritual director should help them to perceive their fecundity as a gift from God, which has not only a physical dimension but also a spiritual one. In this perspective, physical infertility can lead to spiritual fruitfulness. The spiritual director has the task of encouraging and supporting the spouses in their personal and conjugal spiritual development. He can also suggest that the spouses get medical treatment for their infertility, in line with the ethical norms; and, if necessary, he can explain to them the ethical issues concerning

³²⁶ L. Słup, art. cit., 545–6.

³²⁷ M. Dziewiecki, "Kierownictwo duchowe narzeczonych i małżonków," 554.

³²⁸ Cf. L. Słup, "Widziane oczyma żony," 546.

³²⁹ Cf. M. Dziewiecki, "Kierownictwo duchowe narzeczonych i małżonków," in: J. Augustyn – J. Kołacz (eds.), *Sztuka kierownictwa duchowego. Poradnik dla księży*, 554.

³³⁰ L. Słup, "Widziane oczyma żony," 546.

artificial insemination and why it is morally inadmissible (cf. DVt II, 1-6). The spiritual director's help is invaluable when it comes to discerning God's call for spouses to adopt a child or to become more deeply involved in the ecclesial community, especially in the service of human life.³³¹ The perspective of fecundity as a gift indicates the importance of the prayer of the spouses and of the spiritual director (cf. 1 Sam 1:10.17).

The divine plan for fertile love has particular characteristics, and each married couple realizes it in a unique way. The spiritual director's objective is to help the couple to understand that plan and to accompany them as they strive to fulfill it.³³²

Spiritual Direction in the Service of the Ecclesial Communion

The experience of meeting God and the communion with Him through the word of God and the Eucharist leads to a fellowship between believers (EdE 23). The personal development of an individual, which leads to a full Christian identity, should go together with the edification of the ecclesial community.³³³ Participation in building the communion with God and one's brothers and sisters in the Church can also be fostered by the relationship with a spiritual director, formed in the spirit of the Gospel.³³⁴

These rules are also useful in the spiritual life of the spouses. "Among the fruits that ripen if the law of God be resolutely obeyed, the most precious is certainly this, that married couples themselves will often desire to communicate their own experience to others. Thus it comes about that in the fullness of the lay vocation will be included a novel and outstanding form of the apostolate by, which, like ministering to like, married couples themselves by the leadership they offer will become apostles to other married couples" (HV 26). The mature love of the spouses, supported by spiritual direction, manifests itself in a mature family spirituality, radiating to other families and to the wider ecclesial community. Spiritually mature spouses help their children, and also other married couples and families, in shaping fidelity and fear of God, and in their pursuit of holiness.³³⁵

³³¹ Cf. FC 14; DVt II, 8; DDR 67.

³³² Cf. L. Słup, "Widziane oczyma żony," 546.

³³³ R. Hajduk, *Apologetyka pastoralna. Pasterska odpowiedź Kościoła na wyzwania czasów współczesnych*, Krakow 2009, 123.

³³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 100.

³³⁵ FC 71; LtF 16; cf. W. Jankowski, "Kierownictwo duchowe w duszpasterstwie rodzin," 118.

In communities of families, married couples exercise an apostolate for other families by supporting them through prayer, faith, and experience, serving as facilitators or accompanists (cf. LtF 16; AL 223). The experience of formation in movements and communities makes it easier to benefit from accompaniment and supports its exercise. Lively church communities are a place of growth for many lay people who can help spouses and support the spiritual directors.³³⁶ Spiritually mature spouses distinguish themselves by their social involvement, especially in caring for those in need (FC 71). They also assume the role of guides for other spouses (HV 26) in dioceses, parishes, and associations. They are often involved in the structure of family pastoral care and family counseling, and active in premarital and prenuptial catechesis.³³⁷ In the parish communities and neighborhoods, mature spouses can accompany young couples in their development (AL 223, 230).

The spiritual director can help spouses find places for active participation in parishes, religious communities, and church activities,³³⁸ and accompany spiritually married spouses who are already committed.³³⁹ Spouses need help identifying the personal motives for their activity in the church, so that it may truly be a response to God's call. The spiritual director can help them to recognize both the need for engagement and its form. He/she can support spouses on their path of spiritual growth and help them to avoid passivity and withdrawal from the life of ecclesial communities. The director can also recognize immature motives of engagement, tendencies or temptations of excessive activity incompatible with God's call in the present situation and sometimes even in conflict with the fulfillment of the conjugal and family vocation.

Given the threats that the family faces today, forms of pastoral care that help families to grow in piety, prayer, and love for the Church are highly valued (PDV 41). Pope John Paul II emphasized the need to rediscover the great tradition of personal spiritual direction, which has always borne much valuable fruit in the life of the Church. Chaplains are the first to devote time and energy to this work of education and spiritual help that will never be regretted (PDV 40).

³³⁶ L. Słup, "Widziane oczyma żony," 547.

³³⁷ M. Dziewiecki, "Kierownictwo duchowe narzeczonych i małżonków," 558.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 557.

³³⁹ M. Chmielewski, "Kierownictwo duchowe we współczesnych zrzeczeniach katolickich," *Życie duchowe* 1 (2):1995, 55-71; cf. M. Kaszowski, *Posługa kapłana w stowarzyszeniach rodzin*, Przemysł, 1996.